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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [KU](#) [NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SUCCESSION](#) [FREEDOM AGENDA](#)

SUBJECT: LEADING MP "SCARED TO DEATH" ABOUT LEADERSHIP
"CRISIS"; OUTLINES NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PRIORITIES

REF: A. KUWAIT 4406

[B](#). KUWAIT 4403

[C](#). KUWAIT 4372

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (C) Summary and comment: The Ambassador met October 15 with Mohammed Jassem Al-Sager, a National Assembly member (MP) and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Commenting on the recent ruling family spat over the country's future leadership (reftels), sparked by National Guard Chief Shaykh Salem Al-Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah's call for the creation of a three-member committee to run the country, Al-Sager said, "I am scared to death." Al-Sager stressed repeatedly that the current situation constituted a "crisis." "If anything happens in the ruling family, you (the United States) will be directly affected," Al-Sager commented. Turning to National Assembly politics, Al-Sager said there were three priorities for the upcoming National Assembly session: 1) approval of the northern oil fields development project, known as Project Kuwait; 2) passage of the Press and Publications Law; 3) reduction of the number of electoral districts. Al-Sager predicted both Project Kuwait and the Press and Publications Law would be approved, but doubted there was enough support currently to reduce the number of electoral districts, which he said was the most important legislation and a key element of political reform.

[2](#). (C) Comment: Al-Sager very much wants to see prompt decisions by the Al-Sababs to resolve the succession issue. His tendency to over-dramatize the situation reflects his strong desire for clear, coherent Kuwaiti leadership. End summary and comment.

"Scared to Death" about Leadership "Crisis"

[3](#). (C) In an October 15 meeting with the Ambassador, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee MP Mohammed Jassem Al-Sager said he was "scared to death" about Kuwait's recent controversy over the country's future leadership (reftels). Al-Sager stressed repeatedly that "we are in a crisis" and predicted there would be changes soon in Kuwait's top leaders. He said that "the Amir is very sick, the Crown Prince doesn't know anyone around him, and the Prime Minister has a pacemaker." "We are living on luck," he added. Asked about possible future leadership scenarios, Al-Sager said the only "realistic" scenario was for Shaykh Sabah to become Crown Prince. Al-Sager continued: "The problem is that the Salem branch of the Al-Sabah family wants a share of the cake. The issue is whether or not Shaykh Sabah will give it to them."

[4](#). (C) Al-Sager cautioned that if the ruling family does not resolve its problems, critical issues would remain unresolved and key legislation would stall in the National Assembly. Asked for clarification, Al-Sager explained that the National Assembly is currently divided between groups loyal to different factions of the family. "Some MPs support Shaykh Salem Al-Ali, and he is working on them," Al-Sager said. He added, "You don't want to see a confrontation between two sides of the royal family." He suggested that, in the extreme, such a conflict could turn "violent." "If anything happens in the ruling family, you will be directly affected," Al-Sager stressed to the Ambassador. "You should help us solve this problem," he concluded. The Ambassador told Al-Sager that the U.S. was unlikely to get directly involved in arbitrating Kuwait's internal political disputes, and that we saw no transition scenario which would bring fundamental changes to the strong U.S.-Kuwaiti relationship.

Predicts Press Law and Project Kuwait Will Pass;
Electoral Reform Will Not

[5](#). (C) Al-Sager said there were three priorities for the upcoming National Assembly session: 1) approval of the northern oil fields development project, known as Project Kuwait; 2) passage of the Press and Publications Law; and 3) reduction of the number of electoral districts, which

according to Al-Sager was the most important legislation. Al-Sager predicted both the Press and Publications Law and Project Kuwait would be approved by the National Assembly. Al-Sager said he supported reducing the number of electoral districts from 25 to five, or even two, but doubted the number of districts would be reduced to even ten since the Government was ambivalent about the reform. The Ambassador told Al-Sager he had expressed the USG's strong support for electoral reform in numerous meetings with GOK officials and would continue to do so.

16. (C) Asked about other key legislation, Al-Sager said the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which was approved by the Foreign Affairs Committee, "would not be a problem in the National Assembly." He also promised the Ambassador to push for the passage of the long-stalled Article 98 legislation. Al-Sager said he "did not know" if new labor legislation would be passed this session, noting that it had yet to be approved by the Cabinet. "If the Government approves it in the Cabinet, I do not think there will be a problem here in the National Assembly," Al-Sager said.

Political Reform Stymied

17. (C) Al-Sager told the Ambassador three political reforms were essential in Kuwait: 1) recognition of political parties, 2) passage of the Press and Publications Law, and 3) reduction of the number of electoral constituencies, which he said was critical to broader political reform. Al-Sager admitted that recognition of political parties and electoral district reduction were unlikely to be approved anytime soon. Based on regional experience, the Prime Minister still sees political parties as a potentially destabilizing force, he said.

Possible Ouster of "Not a Liberal"

18. (C) Al-Sager told the Ambassador he might not be re-elected as Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee this National Assembly session. He complained the Government was not giving him much support and noted that a new coalition of MPs could oust him. He also mentioned that he will soon start his own newspaper once the new press law permits new publications. Asked if the newspaper would be liberal-leaning (in the Kuwaiti context), Al-Sager said that while he was liberal on "economic, financial, and political issues," he was "very conservative" on social issues. He said he preferred not to be labeled a "liberal" in Kuwait, since that connoted liberal social values. (Note: The Al-Sager family is currently a co-owner of the influential Al-Qabas newspaper. End note.)

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